

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
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**America's Role in the Allied Intervention in Northern Russia and Siberia  
(1918-1920)**

***Case Studies of Mission Creep and Coalition Failure***

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal view and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, or the Department of the Navy.

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## Preface

The President is serving his last term in office. He has your unit on a mission overseas to a country torn by civil war. There is widespread starvation. Heavily armed gangs steal food supplies at gunpoint. They use what they have taken to bribe the loyalty of the populace. You witness what happens to "disloyal" people, but your orders bar you from intervening. One of your allies has co-opted a deal with the most notorious warlord -- you consider it betrayal. The leaders of these violent factions have prices on their heads, so they seldom stay in one place. You are frequently caught in the cross-fire between warring groups, but widespread epidemics endanger you more than bullets. It all seems pointless -- Americans have been here more than a year and have little to show for it. Maybe there's a way out. The people back home are sorry for the widespread suffering, but aren't membership in an international organization, that is supposed to enforce peace, is effective.

Somalia in 1993? This was Siberia in 1919 where Americans were garrisoned in the wake of the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution. The following pages provide case studies that may provoke the thought that not much has changed in the world in 75 years.

This paper is not intended as an historical narrative, but a discussion of the parts of the acronym SLURPO (Security, Legitimacy, Unity of effort, Persistence, and Objective). The reader must bear in mind that the Allied Intervention was a wartime operation whose objective was the defeat of Germany and later the overthrow of Bolshevism. The American effort to keep her forces neutral in Russian internal affairs, however, does closely relate to MOOTW in our own time.

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## Introduction

In April of 1917, the neutral United States entered its first coalition with European powers since the War for Independence. President Woodrow Wilson accepted the risk of this foreign entanglement to make the world "safe for democracy." Together with his Fourteen Points, this axiom of a "safe world" expressed Wilson's desired end state. The other Allies did not share this sentiment but wanted a world in which they could be preeminent. The defeat of Germany would serve everyone's purposes. Even before war's end, however, a new threat to the war effort, empires, and democracy emerged in the form of Bolshevik communism.

Russia made a separate peace with the Central Powers at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March of 1918. This meant German armies could be diverted to the Western Front to mount the anticipated Spring offensive. Moreover, massive quantities of war materiel sent by the Allies to help Russia were now within the easy grasp of Germany. The Russians, hard-pressed to pay the severe reparations under the terms of the treaty, were powerless to prevent German demand for the supplies stockpiled in key ports. The ports also were coveted for use as submarine bases.

The Allied Supreme War Council<sup>1</sup> sought to deny German access to the ports, safeguard the supplies, and prevent the transfer of German forces. Engaged, as the Allies were, in a war of attrition, with replenishment their own dwindling stores constrained by

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<sup>1</sup>The Allied Supreme War Council consisted of the Chief Executives and Foreign Secretaries of Great Britain, France, Italy, and the United States. The military decisions of the Council were implemented by the Permanent Military Representatives:

- United States - LtGen Tasker H. Bliss
- Great Britain - General Henry Hugh Wilson
- France - General Maxime Weygand
- Italy - General Luigi Conte Cardona

submarine blockade, the reconstitution of the Eastern Front was vital to survival. This measure required the landing of Allied forces in Russia, a trespass the Bolsheviks were sure to oppose. President Wilson and his advisors felt this would be a waste of manpower and urged, instead, that the Western Front be reinforced.

A confrontation involving American troops and Russians on their own soil was the last thing Wilson wanted. The sixth of his Fourteen Points specifically called "unequivocally for the 'evacuation from Russia of all foreign forces'."<sup>2</sup> In the midst of the crisis, however, was a force of some 60,000 foreign troops, the Czech Legion, attempting to do exactly that. This fortunate fact allowed Wilson to be a "good ally"<sup>3</sup> and preserve the integrity of his aims. Thus, he consented to sending a token 15,000 American forces to guard supplies in Northern Russia and help the Czechs in Siberia.<sup>4</sup>

Those American forces soon experienced conditions in stark contrast to the political comfort they provided their leader. Though American commanders were under Presidential directive not to engage in hostile action, their soldiers were no less vulnerable to attack. Placed under British command in Northern Russia, Americans were ordered to take their place in the front lines along side British and French troops. Even the passive American

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<sup>2</sup>E.M. Halliday, The Ignorant Armies (New York: Bantam 1958), 19.

<sup>3</sup>Charles J. Weeks, Jr., An American Naval Diplomat in Revolutionary Russia (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 138.

<sup>4</sup>General Milo K. Dietrichs commanded the Czech Legion, was the first element of the Czech Legion to evacuate and was headquartered in Vladivostok with 14,000 Czechs. His "Echelon" Commanders of brevet general rank:

- Jan Syrový, overall Western Czech Legion Commander with an entourage of 2,000 Czechs.
- Stanislaus Cecek, commanded Echelon West, from Penza to Samara, with 8,000 Czechs.
- Bruno Voitsekhovskii, Echelon Center, from Samara to Chelyabinsk and Omsk, with 10,000 Czechs. General Voitsekhovskii actually was a General.
- Rudolph Gajda, commanded Echelon East, from Omsk to Krasnoyarsk, with 5,000 Czechs.

forces in Siberia were perceived to be in support of organized combat against the Bolsheviks. Whether by design or unwittingly, the United States had intervened in the Russian Civil War.

This paper seeks extract lessons learned from case studies of the American expedition to Russia which can be related to current Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). The special problem of "mission creep" is examined as it stems from coalitions, and government departments, pursuing different or sometimes competing war aims. Reliance on non-governmental agencies to provide intelligence or conduct negotiations is also examined. This paper is not just an exposition of what not to do; provided herein is also one example of what a commander can accomplish, even in the most chaotic conditions, when armed with a statement of his superior's intent.

For purposes of brevity and clarity, the "United States" is not meant to be encompassed by the term "Allies."

### **The Commander-in-Chief's Intent**

American forces were deployed to Russia before July of 1918 went without the benefit of knowing their purpose for going. In the absence of definitive guidance, they followed the orders of the senior Allied officer or took their own initiative if warranted by the situation.

The *Aide Memoire*,<sup>5</sup> though often ascribed to Secretary of State Lansing, was actually drafted by President Wilson. In it, he acknowledged inherent differences between United States "Russian" policy and the intentions of the other "associated powers." Wilson disputed the necessity of reconstituting an Eastern Front and warned against taking sides in the internal affairs of Russia, an indication that he was sure one action would lead to the other.

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<sup>5</sup>The complete text of the *Aide Memoire* appears in Appendix A.



Wilson did approve three missions for American forces: to guard war supplies and equipment, aid the Czech evacuation, and provide humanitarian assistance. A fourth mission for operation and maintenance of the Trans-Siberian railroad stemmed from an earlier railroad agreement between Wilson and the Kerensky government. Even though this government no longer existed, the efficient operation of the Trans-Siberian supported the mission to evacuate the Czechs.<sup>6</sup>

The verbiage of *Aide Memoire* was vague, self-contradictory in places, and gave the impression that exceptions could be made:

"Military action is admissible in Russia, as the Government of the United States sees the circumstances, only to help the Czecho-Slovaks consolidate their forces and get into successful cooperation with their Slavic kinsmen *and to steady any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance.*"<sup>7</sup>

The *Aide Memoire* was communicated to all Allied governments, with copies cabled to all United States representatives abroad. Wilson stipulated that his own reservations were not binding on Allied decisions. Only two field commanders received a copy. One was Major General William Graves, commander of the Siberian expedition.<sup>8</sup> The other was Rear Admiral Newton McCully, who was to command the token U.S. Naval Forces in Northern Russia. He received a copy of the *Memoire* in September attached to his orders.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup>Betty Miller Unterberger, America's Siberian Expedition, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1956), 8.

<sup>7</sup>From the *Aide Memoire* (see Appendix A); emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup>The American Expeditionary Force bound for Siberia consisted of the 27th Infantry Regiment, 31st Infantry Regiment, 27th Evacuation Hospital, Company "D" of the 53rd Telegraph Battalion, and headquarters elements of the Eighth Infantry Division. Graves was summoned to a meeting with Secretary of War Baker where he was personally given a copy.

<sup>9</sup>To dispense with detailed discussion on Admiral McCully, one needs to know he was perhaps the leading expert on Russia in the military having served, among other capacities, as an observer during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). McCully's Northern Russia "fleet" consisted on what American ships happened to be present. Frequently there were none and he had to share Flag Quarters with British Admiral J.F.E. Green on

Memoire was referenced in such a way as to give the impression that it was intended for the forces operating in Siberia. As if to add to the contradictions inherent in the *Memoire*, his orders directed him to place himself under the direction of the Senior Naval Officer of the "co-belligerent Powers."<sup>10</sup>

The *Aide Memoire* remained the guiding directive for all that General Graves accomplished or refrained from doing. When requested by U.S. envoys and Allied counterparts to expand his mission, Graves cabled the War Department for further instructions. The answer he typically received was, "you will be guided by those instructions (the *Aide Memoire*) until they are modified by the President."<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the President never amended his instructions during year and nine months in which American forces operated in Siberia, demonstrated he had the utmost confidence in the discernment of General Graves, or that the fate of Russia was no longer an executive concern.

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board the Royal Yacht *Josephine*. McCully's advice on military and humanitarian concerns was largely ignored.

<sup>10</sup>Weeks, 140-141. McCully's orders were as follows:

- Call promptly on our Ambassador and consult with him freely.
- Read careful the President's proclamation on Siberian intervention... Shape your policy in accordance with these pronouncements.
- Cooperate with the military and naval forces of the Allies in so far as those policies above indicated and the forces at your disposal permit. Maintain cordial relations with the senior U.S. Army officer.
- Exert your influence towards the conservation and support of local Russian authority, except where that authority is exercised in a manner contrary to the interests of the Russian people.
- Your actions should make it clear that you are the sincere friend of the Russian people and the American forces have no ulterior military or political motives inimical to Russian sovereignty.
- Subject to the restrictions imposed by our government's policy and these instructions you will regard yourself as under the orders of the Senior Naval Officer of the co-belligerent Powers present in Northern Russian Waters.

<sup>11</sup>William S. Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931), 160.

## From Expedition to Intervention

Woodrow Wilson championed the "self-determination of peoples" for which Czechoslovakia was his poster child. The Czech Legion, a foreign elite unit of the Imperial Russian Army, was being repatriated by the Allies to the Western Front. They used the fastest means possible, riding the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Vladivostok, and sailing by ship across two oceans to France. The Soviet Commissar of Foreign Nationalities, Josef Stalin, had granted the Czechs safe conduct.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, the local Soviets along the route, which were not in lock-step with Moscow, made repeated attempts to disarm the Czechs who finally felt compelled to fight their way out. Their progress across Russia impressed the Allies.<sup>13</sup>

Approximately 14,000 reached Vladivostok between April and May of 1918. On 20 June, the French Minister of War issued the very first direct order in which Allied intervention in Russia specified a military goal: Czech Legion echelons still in transit were to hold their positions along the Trans-Siberian Railway.<sup>14</sup> On 28 June, the Czechs in Vladivostok, with the help of Japanese and American landing forces, seized control of the

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<sup>12</sup>Richard Goldhurst, The Midnight War (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 27.

<sup>13</sup>Goldhurst, 43-44. The Czech Legion had a number of armored trains for each of their "echelons," many of which they repaired or assembled themselves from cannibalized parts from some 200 disabled locomotives. Gajda equipped a state-of-the-art armored train, the *Orlik* ("Little Eagle") featuring, among other armaments, naval guns inside turrets that could rotate 360 degrees, and armored sheathing to protect ammunition supplies — all the refinements for waging a mobile war or running a small government. Wood or coal-burning trains of that time could haul a maximum of twenty fully laden railroad cars, which translated into the evacuation of approximately 800 men per train.

<sup>14</sup>Goldhurst, 53-54; The Czech Government-in-exile, "National Council of Czechoslovakian Countries," under leadership of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, was headquartered in Paris. French General J. Lavergne was Chief of the French Military Mission to Russia which directed the activities of the Czech Legion as part of the Allies.

local government, and important facilities including the railyards. Khabarovsk was also seized.

As of then, the *Aide Memoire* had not yet been published. Admiral Austin Knight, in command of U.S. Asiatic Fleet, acted at his own discretion as an Ally to support the Czechs.<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, General Graves, upon his arrival on 1 September, found himself already at odds with his naval counterpart. He had come to evacuate the Czechs who were desperately needed on the Western Front. The 14,000 who were already in the port could leave at once. Months passed, however, and not a solitary legionnaire had been evacuated due to "lack of transport."<sup>16</sup> The real reason, of course, was that full Allied participation in the Russian Civil War, or the "intervention," had begun.<sup>17</sup> The Czechs began to conduct offensive operations under Allied orders, or fought alongside various "White" armies.

The Allies had seized Archangelsk on 2 August 1918, days after the Czech Legion occupied Ekaterinaberg<sup>18</sup> in the Urals, and actually moving westward toward Perm. Within days, General Poole's forces had progressed more than thirty miles into the interior,<sup>19</sup> along a section of track leading to Viatka, the city just beyond Perm. This "front" would eventually

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<sup>15</sup>Goldhurst, 54-56.

<sup>16</sup>Graves, 44-45.

<sup>17</sup>The Intervention forces consisted of those from Great Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Poland, Finland, Latvia, Armenia, Japan, the not yet formed Czechoslovakia, and their "Associate" the United States.

<sup>18</sup>Czech forces actually liberated Ekaterinaberg ten days after Tsar Nicholas II and his entire family, were murdered. Ironically, the possibility of the Czechs freeing the Tsar from his Red captors may have hastened his demise.

<sup>19</sup>Halliday, 35. The northern "Railroad Front," and America's inadvertent war against the Bolsheviks, was opened by a landing party of Bluejackets, led by an Ensign. These were from the U.S.S. *Olympia*, which was America's entire naval presence in the region. On a locomotive with a flatcar, the sailors pursued a Bolshevik unit fleeing the Archangelsk railyards until halted by a relentless artillery barrage. They were relieved by the French 21st Colonial Battalion.

be advanced to Nijni Gora, some 250 miles from Archangelsk. Because of this, The Supreme War Council directed both forces to fight their way toward Viatka with the intent of effecting a junction.

Meanwhile, in Archangelsk, the mission of the American contingent<sup>20</sup> of Northern Russia Expeditionary Force (NREF) was at full gallop.<sup>21</sup> Its commanding officer, Colonel George Stewart, had been in transit at the time the *Memoire* was promulgated. He received orders specifying only that he report to the senior British officer, Major General Frederick Poole.<sup>22</sup> Stewart made feeble attempts to retain command of his troops as they were marched-off, not to guard duty, but to the front lines.<sup>23</sup> He received no support from the American Ambassador, David Francis, who was known to favor British Russian policy to that of his own government.

General Poole was apparently unaware of restrictions regarding the use of American troops. The U.S.S. *Olympia* had already participated in the battle to take Archangelsk.<sup>24</sup> Now that fresh American troops had arrived, he would use them to relieve his own men who had been more than a month at the front.<sup>25</sup> After all, America wanted in on this war.

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<sup>20</sup>American forces in Archangelsk consisted of the 339th Infantry Regt., 310th Engineers, 337th Field Hospital, and the 337th Ambulance Company.

<sup>21</sup>This expression is ascribed to General Anthony Zinni, USMC.

<sup>22</sup>Halliday, 42.

<sup>23</sup>Halliday, 42-43.

<sup>24</sup>Goldhurst, 91. In addition to landing party, already mentioned, the *Olympia* provided gunfire support. An interesting note: Mudyug island, on the approach to Archangelsk, was taken with a combined force including sea, air, and land elements -- the first joint action in warfare history.

<sup>25</sup>Halliday, 45. Under the pretext of making the Allied force appear as "one army" he divided American Regiment into "special" tactical units and placed them under command of British officers. It was rumored that British officers carried extra pips to field promote themselves when confronted by an American officer of equal rank. Poole made liberal use of brevet promotion, even to the rank of Brigadier.

Ambassador Francis did little to dissuade him. Perhaps Francis misinterpreted the *Aide Memoire* or simply chose to ignore it. This is still a matter of debate. President Wilson, on the other hand, knew what the other Allied leaders had planned from the beginning. A British survey the President received on 3 July 1918 spoke of establishing "bridgeheads" from the northern ports "from which forces can eventually advance rapidly to the center of Russia."<sup>26</sup>

### The Role of Diplomacy

At the time of the Allied intervention, there were five "White Russian" governments.<sup>27</sup> None of these was successor to the Kerensky government to whom the Allied ambassadors had presented their credentials. With no central government, *de facto* recognition of local authority was sometimes necessary for Allied commanders to ensure the safety and comfort of their forces. Before long, *de facto* recognition became confused as *de jure*.

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<sup>26</sup>Halliday, 30.

<sup>27</sup>The term "White Russian" is thought to mean Tsarist. By virtue of the Bolsheviks referring to themselves as "Red," their opponents called themselves "White." These were of diverse, and sometimes competing political leanings, which included the Socialists.

The following is a list of the White governments "in power" at the time of the intervention:

- Supreme Administration of the Northern Region, led by Nikolai K. Tchaikovsky in Archangelsk
- Samara Government or Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (known by the acronym "KOMUCH" in Russian)
- Omsk Government or the Siberian Provisional Government (formerly known as the Siberian Duma), later headed by Admiral Kolchak.
- In Vladivostok, General Dmitri L. Horvat, General Manager of the Chinese Eastern Railway, Dictator for the Far Eastern Committee for Defense of the Fatherland and the Constituent Assembly.
- Also in Vladivostok was the rival Provisional Committee of an Autonomous Siberia, under Peter Derber; this was the government foreign representatives in Siberia would recognize.

After the October Revolution toppled the Provisional Government in 1917, the foreign diplomatic corps evacuated from Petrograd to Vologda. This precaution allowed the Allied governments to avoid the issue of recognition until a more stable Russian government established itself. Vologda was also a convenient location to move in any number of directions in case the diplomats had to flee Russia altogether.<sup>28</sup> Archangelsk eventually became the site of the American and other embassies, where they remained until the Allies evacuated in 1919.

Concurrent with the void in diplomatic relations, American consular offices were established in the ports and at virtually every major railroad stop across Russia. Consuls were there ostensibly to assist American citizens fleeing Russia's turmoil and undoubtedly to prepare for the anticipated mass exodus of Russians. Since telegraph lines paralleled the railroad, the consulates often received and held messages for the Allied armies, though no links existed between Siberia and Northern Russia<sup>29</sup>.

The contact between Allied military forces and American consuls led to some embarrassing situations. The consuls often gave assurances of United States intentions that went far beyond the competence of the entry level positions they occupied. Furthermore, Consul MacGowan in Irkutsk fueled the rumor that freed German and Austria prisoners of war, armed by the Bolsheviks, were roaming Siberia.<sup>30</sup> Among the absurd rumors, the freed prisoners were said to be arranging the transport, to Germany, of Allied war supplies from

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<sup>28</sup>W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 169.

<sup>29</sup>A message from Vladivostok to Archangelsk had to go to Harbin, then to Peking, and then by what ever circuitous route was available.

<sup>30</sup>Graves, 29-33. The only bona fide POWs encountered were still in shackles and, ironically, were caused to be freed by the Americans, some as late as 1920.

Russian ports, or were attempting to establish a front for the Central Powers in Asia.<sup>31</sup> The American Consul General in Moscow, Maddin Summers, to his discredit, portrayed the Bolsheviks as agents of German imperialist designs on Russia.<sup>32</sup>

Because American consuls had to avoid any contact with the Bolsheviks that might create the illusion of recognition, Ambassador Francis and the State Department became reliant on intelligence from other American spokesmen, such as Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Robins of the American Red Cross. Robins was a strong advocate of Allied recognition of the Bolsheviks and fantasized that an anti-German alliance could be formed with them.<sup>33</sup> Fortunately, Ambassador Francis, to whom Robins regularly sent reports, was enough of a die-hard anti-Bolshevik to disregard his recommendations. It should be noted that Robins based many of his opinions on personal relationships he enjoyed with Bolshevik leaders. Because of the favorable content of his reports, he was given regular nightly access to the telegraph.<sup>34</sup>

In his dealings with American consuls, Graves was struck by the fact that the State Department and War Department were not coordinated or mutually-informed and seemed to be pursue separate, often conflicting policies.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, on the other side of Russia, Ambassador Francis was "leading the U.S. commander by the nose and arrogating the right to shape the course of U.S. military operations."<sup>36</sup> The subjective opinions of these diplomats

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<sup>31</sup>John Albert White, The Siberian Intervention (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 164, 169.

<sup>32</sup>George F. Kennan, The Decision to Intervene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 168.

<sup>33</sup>Lincoln, 166.

<sup>34</sup>Kennan, 169, 177. Robins was easily impressed. He based his confidence in the Soviet regime on Trotsky's ability to recover Robins' automobile, which had been commandeered by an Anarchist faction.

<sup>35</sup>Graves, 191.

<sup>36</sup>Halliday, ix. Francis possessed "a certain truculence which was not the least salient trait in a predominantly



inexperienced in military matters and the self-appointed expertise of non-government officials hardly gave an accurate picture to the decision-makers in Washington.

The fact is that the Administration had little interest in Russia - so little that it sought to transfer related policy decisions from the Department of State to an independent commission comprised of private citizens and non-governmental agencies.<sup>37</sup> Private interest groups driving policy directly? This never came about, perhaps because of the predicament of our forces. As long as our soldiers were enforcing American policy, the government could not absolve itself of responsibility for that policy.

There was a disparate lack of cultural intelligence on Russia at the Department of State. Russia's situation, current in 1918, was evaluated using America's understanding of the old Tsarist model as the standard. Americans were suspicious of anything that had co-existed with the Tsar, even institutions which were ingrained in historical Russian culture. The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, fell victim not only to the Bolsheviks, but was ignored by the Americans as a means to rally the people and act as a conscience to the various White factions.<sup>38</sup> As was typical in those times, our diplomats and policy makers reacted to opinions based on other people's subjective version of events, rather than real facts from objective, qualified sources.<sup>39</sup>

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egotistical character" (ibid., 25).

<sup>37</sup>Kennan, 338.

<sup>38</sup>White, 181. The Japanese did not overlook the importance of this factor and enlisted the aid of the Japanese Orthodox Church to help build good relations with the Siberian populace.

<sup>39</sup>Weeks, 169: "The American intervention in North Russia was characterized by a colossal breakdown in communications in which officials in Washington debated policies they could not implement and failed to make effective use of intelligence rendered by experts in the field. The Wilson administration based policy on *its concept* of what was happening in Russia rather than actual events. In short, Washington became something of an ivory tower" (emphasis, mine). Also see Graves, xiii - xiv.

The ruthlessness of some White armies, particularly the Cossacks, did not help the United States embrace the anti-Bolshevik cause. The American administration was unwilling to contaminate itself through contact with factions that weren't totally pure. Our search for a mirror image led only to shadowy figures such as Admiral Kolchak. As George F. Kennan writes, Wilson harbored

"...a fond hope that the mere arrival of American, Japanese, British, and French forces in Russia might touch off a 'spontaneous, democratic action' which in the long run would bring the right kind of government to the Russian people without American troops having done anything that could be construed as interference in the internal political affairs of the country. In all of modern history there may never have been a fonder hope, more thoroughly doomed to disappointment."<sup>40</sup>

The failure to cultivate a relationship with the Russian people doomed the mission of Americans and Allies from the start. The British and French were more concerned with recovering the war debts, the Americans dismissed the need to understand the Russian psyche. The inability of the United States and Allies to find a compliant political was no excuse for abandoning the Russian people to ultimate chaos after their objectives were accomplished.

### **The Trans-Siberian Railroad**

The Trans-Siberian Railroad was 4,700 miles from the Urals to its eastern terminus, Vladivostok. One fact was sure: whoever held the railway had at their disposal the fastest, most effective means of transport in Russia, access to towns and stockpiles of supplies along its route, and the "right-of-way" for the prosecution of the war.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Halliday, 29.

<sup>41</sup>Goldhurst, 119. Russia had not realized full utilization of the Trans-Siberian until the Great War. During the previous war with Japan, a large span of track was incomplete in the middle; the gap was "bridged" by

The U.S. Russian Railway Service Corps<sup>42</sup>, under Colonel George Emerson, ensured the continuous operation of the railroad from Omsk to Vladivostok. Units of the 27th Infantry worked closely with the non-combatant Railway Corps, by providing security detachments. This role gave the impression that the railroad had been militarized, as indeed it had. The Allies' ordering the Czechs to conduct offensive operations meant the railroad had to be kept in operation until they finally did withdraw.

Graves instructed Emerson, however, to enforce the neutrality of rail use. This was difficult as the people in railway towns lived there in order to place themselves under American protection. If Bolshevik personnel, cargoes, or trains had been prohibited, as the Allies wanted, then the railroads, including those settlements, would have become a target of attack. Therefore, the standing rule for the Trans-Siberian was than even an armored train, no matter whose, was free to use the right-of-way as long as it was not running out its guns<sup>43</sup>. Needless to say, this ROE required very keen instincts and the utmost restraint.

Aside from its military uses, the railroad was critical to the flow of humanitarian aid, the transit of Red Cross supply and hospital trains, and the evacuation of war refugees. For

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means of a three-day sled-journey. When Russia mobilized against Germany, logisticians deemed the eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian, Vladivostok, the safer port-of-entry for war supplies. These were then shipped westward to the Eastern Front. The track to ice-free Murmansk was not complete until 1916.

<sup>42</sup>The U.S. Russian Railway Service Corps was founded under the charter of the Railroad Agreement between Woodrow Wilson and Alexander Kerensky. 300 top railroad engineers and management experts were commissioned but could not reach Russia immediately because of the October Revolution. Though individual officers of the Corps toured the Trans-Siberian empowering local Russian managers to make the needed improvements, the Railway Corps finally went into full operation as a unit in the Spring of 1919, with service detachments in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Harbin (Manchuria), Chita, Irkutsk, Krasnoiarsk, and Omsk. No equivalent unit serviced the railroad in Northern Russia though there was some expertise in the 339th Infantry that managed to keep the Archangelsk streetcars running.

<sup>43</sup>Lincoln, 188. Armored trains were something of an *RMA*. Leon Trotsky's infamous *Red Train* included a printing press, telegraph, radio station, electrical generators, library, bathhouse, garage with several automobiles, gasoline supplies, workshops to repair weapons or manufacture boots, and stores of everything from field glasses to tobacco to "raise the morale of Red Army fighting men."

that reason, but especially to keep it intact for the Czechs,<sup>44</sup> Graves did not want to see the railway endangered by attempting to restrict who or what traveled on it.

### Humanitarian Assistance

President Wilson promised the aid of non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross and YMCA. These organizations already had Russian chapters supported largely by American and British volunteers, some of whom were also serving officers in their respective armed forces. This lent them an air of legitimacy, but it did not prevent them from interfering in military affairs, against which the *Aide Memoire* cautioned.

There were seemingly countless people who in some way purported to be an American "spokesman" or "representative," or who just overstepped their bounds. For instance, Dr. Teusler, Head of the American Red Cross in Siberia, promised American military intervention at the side of the Czechs and was openly critical of General Graves' conservatism. Dr. Teusler was sure of himself by virtue of being the First Lady's cousin, a fact he made frequently known before the press.<sup>45</sup> Teusler was a continuous thorn in the flesh for Graves. He unfairly provisioned factions supported by the Japanese, such the Cossacks led by Ataman Semenov.<sup>46</sup>

American diplomats, such a Consul Felix Cole, favored using humanitarian aide as a coercive measure, to "bribe the local population."<sup>47</sup> To make this method appear more

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<sup>44</sup>The railroad had been sabotaged by the Bolsheviks in numerous places, precisely to block the progress of the Czechs. Fortunately, the majority of Czech soldiers had been rail workers, themselves, or had worked in heavy industry. They were able breach wide gaps in the track, repair locomotives, and build bridges across rivers and lakes that could support the weight of their trains.

<sup>45</sup>Goldhurst, 82.

<sup>46</sup>Graves, 205-207.

<sup>47</sup>Weeks, 172.

positive, his recommendation was couched in terms of "rewarding" the regions that refused to harbor or turned-in Red partisans. Interestingly, this was one facet of policy that would have been consistent with Russian penchant for using food as a weapon. When a Red Cross delegation proposed unbiased distribution of food and medicines "to the Russian people," Lenin's immediate retort was "What Russians?"<sup>48</sup> The Wilson Administration had hoped humanitarian aid could be brought "directly to the people over the head of the governmental authority."<sup>49</sup>

In Northern Russia, the Bolsheviks actually ordered large numbers of their men to surrender to the Allies, who were known for their humanity. In this way, Red soldiers received "rest and recuperation," albeit in an overcrowded jail cell. The extra mouths to feed were calculated to be a drain on their scarce resources.<sup>50</sup>

Humanitarian assistance, of course, was directed by the United States Government for which the Red Cross and other agencies were only distribution agents. One flaw in the U.S. plan was the omission of any procedure of evacuation of White Russians who had been loyal to the Allied cause and surely faced extermination once the Allies departed. Winston Churchill himself gave assurances of "asylum" to any Russian desiring it of the British.<sup>51</sup> Admiral McCully devoted himself to programming humanitarian relief beyond the Allies' tenure in Russia, and sought to repatriate Whites from Siberia to Alaska. The United States not only closed its doors, but chose this time to deport aliens of Russian nationality.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Kennan, 338.

<sup>49</sup>Kennan, 337.

<sup>50</sup>Halliday, 248.

<sup>51</sup>Halliday, 247.

<sup>52</sup>Weeks, 187-190.

### **After the Armistice**

After Germany made peace, the Allied forces remained in Russia. The end state for the world was unaffected by the peace, but no new objectives were defined.

As of November 11, 1918, the requirement to reopen the Eastern Front no longer existed. Allied forces, including American soldiers, were engaged on that very day in a life-or-death struggle against the enemy they were not originally sent to fight. The Bolsheviks no longer needed to be portrayed as pro-German, the Allies had been fighting them for some time based on their own merits. A reassessment, however, on the necessity for doing so, seemed in order.

Morale was sagging in Northern Russia. If the Armistice meant any prospect of going home, such hopes were dashed by the onset of winter and the freezing of the White Sea. The Allies would have to wait it out until the Spring thaw which comes late in the high latitudes. In the meantime, they had deepened their front in a futile attempt to link up with the Czechs. Now they had to emulate them, and fight their way out.

Nearby French troops had already mutinied on the news of the Armistice, but remained at the front out of loyalty to their American comrades. After a series of rear guard actions, including a feinted offensive, the Americans departed Archangelsk in June, 1919. Their evacuation had a profound impact on the Russians, whom the British had failed to inspire into a popular front to oppose the Bolsheviks.

"The Americans had been well liked, especially by many peasants of the region, and whatever small enthusiasm these had been able to muster for the war against Bolshevism had been fed largely by American participation. If the

Yankees were giving up the struggle, it seems reasonable to a good many peasants that the time had come for them to give up too."<sup>53</sup>

The supplies the Americans had been sent to guard were to be left for the local Russians to defend Archangelsk. The British destroyed their supplies to prevent capture and then evacuated themselves<sup>54</sup>.

### **What Works - Siberia**

Since the fighting Czechs were unwilling to evacuate, there was little for Graves' men to do except guard supplies and keep the Japanese under scrutiny.

Vital American economic interests were at stake in Siberia, especially preserving the "Open Door" to China; hence, the necessity of keeping Japanese expansion in check. Japan was an Ally, the only one in the Pacific with sufficient forces to react to mounting tensions in Siberia.

Japan already occupied Korea, large tracts of Manchuria and was threatening the rest of China. She had taken over Germany's Asiatic and Pacific possessions and, for purposes of the war effort, relatively idle. Before committing to Siberia, Japan's leaders desired economic, military, and political backing from the United States. Japan wanted the sparse American forces from the Philippines to be spread thin across Siberia where their presence would appear to sanction Japanese actions.

America had reason to be suspicious, as the offers of American possessions made by German Foreign Minister Zimmerman to entice Japan to join their side were a recent memory,

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<sup>53</sup>Halliday, 238.

<sup>54</sup>Halliday, 250.

and rumors of new German "deals" were in wide circulation. Negotiations between Washington and Tokyo agreed that a Japanese force of 12,000 could do the job.

Though the Supreme War Council did not designate Siberia as a "theater" or "front," but was purported to have placed Vladivostok under the Japanese, by virtue of their commander's seniority. General Graves was informed of this by General Kikuzo Otani himself, but politely declined to subordinate himself or his men.<sup>55</sup> General Otani next proposed an assigned sector for the Americans, west of Lake Baikal. Graves again stood firm stating he had insufficient forces to disperse them so widely<sup>56</sup>.

Japanese troops were also garrisoned throughout central Siberia, in towns where there was little threat. Japanese strength had swelled to an estimated 72,000, far beyond the agreed upon number. General Otani desired to widen the area of responsibility in order to justify this number of troops.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, assigning the Americans as far west as possible provided the Japanese a free hand in eastern Siberia where they had co-opted the assistance of the notorious Cossacks Semenov and Khalmakov, whose atrocities rivaled any committed by the Red Guard.

In Siberia there was no organized combat with the Bolsheviks, though they were attacked if they presented a threat. General Graves kept his men impartial and safe throughout the operation, though violence was rampant and included two general insurrections in Vladivostok itself. He concluded that the terms "Bolshevik" and

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<sup>55</sup>Graves, 58.

<sup>56</sup>Graves, 67-68.

<sup>57</sup>Graves, 90.



"Monarchist" did not accurately indicate political leanings and were no basis on which to act for or against groups or individuals.<sup>58</sup> The Japanese were not so restrained.

The relative stability of his assigned sector allowed luxuries such as field exercises, parades, and even rodeos -- all of these served another purpose, as a show of force and a demonstration of prowess, to the warring factions of Russia and to ambitious elements within the Allied camp.

Attempts were made to deride Graves' reputation during the McCarthy era. His adherence to the "spirit and letter" of his instructions was based on superior discernment that should have made him a hero in the 1930s when Japanese aggression was the watchword.<sup>59</sup> By resisting Japanese pressure to deploy combined American and Japanese forces into western Siberia, which Japan might not have relinquished, Graves denied Japan a greater position from which to menace neighboring China and perhaps delayed their imperialist designs for the decade to come.

Newton D. Baker, the former Secretary of War, had this to say in retrospect:

"-- it was justified by conditions as they appeared to be at the time, it refrained from militaristic adventures of its own, it restrained such adventures on the part of others, and it created a situation which made necessary the withdrawal of all Allied forces from Siberian soil when it was withdrawn, thus making impossible territorial conquests and acquisitions on Russian soil by other nations whose interests in the Far East might easily have induced them to take over for pacification, and ultimately for permanent colonial administration, vast areas of Russia's Far East."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Graves, 95.

<sup>59</sup>Graves, xi.

<sup>60</sup>Graves, xi-xii.

Graves' Siberia expedition was highly successful, meeting all of its objectives and safely withdrawing with a minimum of casualties. The American expedition to Northern Russia, to the contrary, was a fiasco by any standard and owed its survival to the esprit within tactical units, not to any feat of leadership or organization.

The withdrawal of the Allies and defeat of White Russians in Northern Russia, and the execution of Admiral Kolchak in Siberia, had a culminating affect on the rest of Allied operations in everywhere in Russia. Historians speculate on the reason's why Wilson finally ordered withdrawal: his own failing health and the end of his term of office, the Senate's refusal to ratify the League of Nations, and the replacement of the reactionary military regime in Japan by a liberal government, thus alleviating America's presence to police Japanese expansionism<sup>61</sup>

### **Lessons Learned**

- Obtain specific Rules of Engagement (ROEs). Seek clarification if the rules are vague or the situation changes.
- Know what relationships exist between Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Volunteer Organizations (PVOs) and Government agencies. Be sure your people know the difference.
- Don't expect to remain completely neutral in an area where an ally operates as a belligerent.
- Obtain intelligence on history, culture and religion, to avoid "emotional planning."
- Deal with all factions even-handedly; react to actions not allegiance.
- Beware of factions attempting exploit the people's needs: food becomes a weapon of persuasion against the starving, medicine against the sick.

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<sup>61</sup>Goldhurst, 260.

## Conclusion

Allies seldom envision an identical end state nor implement similar courses of action in pursuit of a common strategic objective. Lacking sufficient power to confront an enemy as individual nations, divergent aims are often overlooked for the sake of a common front. The ambitions of alliance members are not always high-minded. Some nations may join to earn prestige, others a place at the peace table. Yet others may be waiting to beat their allies to the spot vacated by the defeated enemy. In coalition warfare, as Clausewitz relates, the cause to which an ally is most loyal is his own.

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## Appendix A

### *The Secretary of State to the Allied Ambassadors:*

#### **Aide Memoire<sup>1</sup>**

The whole heart of the people of the United States is in the winning of this war. The controlling purpose of the Government of the United States is to do everything that is necessary and effective to win it. It wishes to cooperate in every practicable way with the allied governments, and to cooperate ungrudgingly; for it has no ends of its own to serve and believes that the war can be won only by common council and intimate concert of action. It has sought to study every proposed policy or action in which its cooperation has been asked in this spirit, and states the following conclusions in the confidence, that if it finds itself obliged to decline participation in any undertaking or course of action, it will be understood that it does so only because it deems itself precluded from participating by imperative considerations either of policy or fact.

In full agreement with the allied governments and upon unanimous advice of the Supreme War Council, the Government of the United States adopted, upon its entrance into the war, a plan for taking part in the fighting on the western front into which all its resources of men and material were to be put, and put as rapidly as possible, and it has carried out this plan with energy and success, pressing its execution more and more rapidly forward and literally putting into it the entire energy and executive force of the nation. This was its response, its very willing and hearty response, to what was the unhesitating judgment alike of its own military advisers and of the advisers of the allied governments. It is now considering, at the suggestion of the Supreme War Council, the possibility of making very considerable additions even to this immense programme which, if they should prove feasible at all, will tax the industrial processes of the United States and the shipping facilities of the whole group of associated nations to the utmost. It has thus concentrated all its plans and all its resources upon this single absolutely necessary object.

In such circumstances it feels it to be its duty to say that it cannot, so long as the military situation on the western front remains critical, consent to break or slacken the force of its present effort by diverting part of its military force to other points or objectives. The United States is at a great distance from the field of action on the western front; it is at a much greater distance from any other field of action. The instrumentalities by which it is to handle its armies and its stores have at great cost and with great difficulty been created in France. They do not exist elsewhere. It is practicable for her to do a great deal in France; it is not practicable for her to do anything of importance or on a large scale upon any other field.

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<sup>1</sup>George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 482-485.

The American Government, therefore, very respectfully requested its Associates to accept its deliberate judgment that it should not dissipate its force by attempting important operations elsewhere.

It regards the Italian front as closely coordinated with the western front, however, and is willing to divert a portion of its military forces from France to Italy if it is the judgment and wish of the Supreme War Council that it should do so. It wishes to defer to the decision of the Commander-in-Chief in this matter, as it could wish to defer in all others, particularly because it considers these two fronts so related as to be practically but separate parts of a single line and because it would be necessary that any American troops sent to Italy should be subtracted from the number used in France and be actually transported across French territory from the ports now used by armies of the United States.

It is the clear and fixed judgment of the Government of the United States, arrived at after repeated and very searching reconsiderations of the whole situation in Russia, that military intervention there would add to the present sad confusion in Russia rather than cure it, injure her rather than help her, and that it would be of no advantage in the prosecution of our main design, to win the war against Germany. It cannot, therefore, take part in such intervention or sanction it in principle. Military intervention would, in its judgment, even supposing it to be efficacious in its immediate avowed object of delivering an attack upon Germany from the east, be merely a method of making use of Russia, not a method of serving her. Her people could not profit by it, if they profitted by it at all, in time to save them from their present distresses, and their substance would be used to maintain foreign armies, not to reconstitute their own. Military action is admissible in Russia, as the Government of the United States sees the circumstances, only to help the Czecho-Slovaks consolidate their forces and get into successful cooperation with their Slavic kinsmen and to steady any efforts at self-government or self-defense in which the Russians themselves may be willing to accept assistance. Whether from Vladivostok or from Murmansk and Archangel, the only legitimate object for which American or allied troops can be employed, it submits, is to guard military stores which may subsequently be needed by Russian forces and to render such aid as may be acceptable to the Russians in the organization of their own self-defense. For helping the Czecho-Slovaks there is immediate necessity and sufficient justification. Recent developments have made it evident that that it is in the interest of what the Russian people themselves desire, and the Government of the United States is glad to contribute the small force at its disposal for that purpose. It yields, also, to the judgment of the Supreme Command in the matter of establishing a small force at Murmansk, to guard the military stores at Kola and to make it safe for Russian forces to come together in organized bodies in the north. But it owes it to frank counsel to say that it can go no further than these modest and experimental plans. It is not in a position and has no expectation of being in a position, to take part in organized intervention in adequate force from either Vladivostok or Murmansk and Archangel. It feels that it ought to add, also, that it will feel at liberty to use the few troops it can spare only for the purposes here stated and shall feel obliged to withdraw these forces, in order to add them to the forces at the western front, if the plans in whose execution it is now intended that they

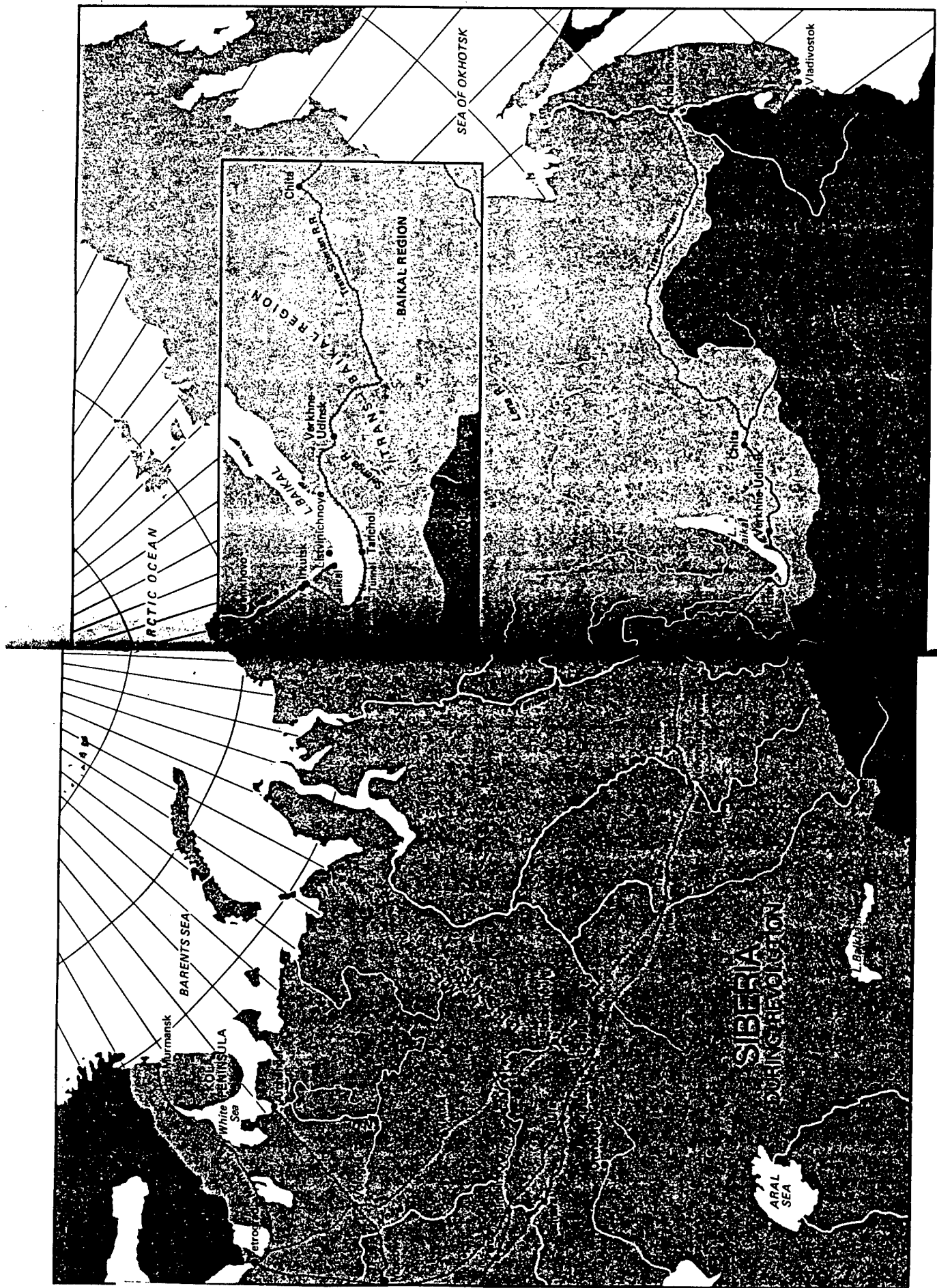
should develop into others inconsistent with the policy to which the Government of the United States feels constrained to restrict itself.

At the same time the Government of the United States wishes to say with the utmost cordiality and good will that none of the conclusions here stated is meant to wear the least color of criticism of what other governments associated against Germany may think it wise to undertake. It wishes in no way to embarrass their choices of policy. All that is intended here is a perfectly frank and definite statement of the policy which the United States feels obliged to adopt for herself and in the use of her own military forces. The Government of the United States does not wish it to be understood that in so restricting its own activities it is seeking, even by implication, to set limits to the action or to define the policies of its Associates.

It hopes to carry out the plans for safeguarding the rear of the Czecho-Slovaks operating from Vladivostok in a way that will place it and keep it in close cooperation with a small military force like its own from Japan, and if necessary from the other Allies, and that it will assure it of the cordial accord of all the allied powers; and it proposes to ask all associated in this course of action to unite in assuring the people of Russia in the most public and solemn manner that none of the governments uniting in action either in Siberia or in northern Russia contemplates any interference of any kind with the political sovereignty of Russia, any intervention in her internal affairs, or any impairment of her territorial integrity either now or hereafter. but that each of the associated powers has the single object of affording such aid as shall be acceptable, and only such aid as shall be acceptable, to the Russian people in their endeavour to regain control their own affairs, their own territory, and their own destiny.

It is the hope and purpose of the Government of the United States to take advantage of the earliest opportunity to send to Siberia a commission of merchants, agricultural experts, labour advisers, Red Cross Representatives, and agents of the Young Men's Christian Association accustomed to organizing the best methods of spreading useful information and rendering educational help of a modest sort, in order in some systematic manner to relieve the immediate economic necessities of the people there in every way for which opportunity may open. The execution of this plan will follow and will not be permitted to embarrass the military assistance rendered in the rear of the westward-moving forces of the Czecho-Slovaks.

*Department of State,  
Washington, July 17, 1918.*



Map from Richard Goldhurst, *The Midnight War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978)